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Architects of the Andrew W. Mellon
Memorial Fountain.

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WASHINGTON, April 24: The Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain will be dedicated on Friday, May 9, at 12:30 p.m. The exercises will take place at the fountain site at the intersection of Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, at Sixth Street, directly north of the National Gallery of Art, in Washington.

Erected at a cost of over $300,000, this memorial to the late Secretary of the Treasury and Pittsburgh financier was designed and constructed without cost to the Federal Government. All funds were raised through the private contributions of friends of Mr. Mellon by the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Committee. Authorization to erect the fountain on the above mentioned site was granted the committee by a Joint Resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives, approved July 16, 1947. At the dedication exercises on May 9, the fountain will be turned over to the Secretary of the Interior for operation by the National Park Service.

The Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain is so constructed that the falling water forms a smooth, transparent curtain over the polished bronze rim of its lower and largest bowl. Erected at the eastern apex of what is known as the Triangle, it will be seen by visitors to Washington arriving at the Union Station or visiting the Capitol Building or the National Gallery of Art.

The remainder of the Triangle is occupied by the great government buildings such as the Apex Building, the National Archives, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, The Post Office Department, and the Department of Commerce. These buildings were planned, and most of them erected, during the period when Mr. Mellon, as Secretary of the Treasury, served as Chairman of a committee to direct the development of this group of buildings.

In 1938, Otto R. Eggers, partner of Eggers and Higgins, New York architects for this fountain and for the National Gallery of Art, visited Italy in order to select the marble for the twenty-four dark green columns that adorn the Rotunda of the National Gallery. While in Genoa he happened to notice a bronze fountain in one of the squares of the city. He was impressed with the interesting decorative possibilities inherent in a sparkling, smooth curtain of water. and filed the thought away for future reference with a view that some opportunity might present itself where the idea could be used to its best advantage.

The fountain is a circular composition, designed to fit the unusual shape of the site. The fountain consists of three tiers of basins, cast in bronze, from which cascades of water flow into a low granite-curbed pool, 55'4" in diameter. Water is supplied from the central jet or plume, and falls from the two top basins into the major bronze basin. There it is kept at a constant level by various controls, and is tempered and smoothed by means of a bronze baffle so that, when it finally pours over the lip of the basin, it becomes a clear transparent plastic-like

sheet which catches the reflections of the surroundings and ripples lightly with the breeze.

The well-known American sculptor, Sidney Waugh, prepared the twelve sculptural signs of the Zodiac, with their cabalistic signs above, which were cast in high bronze relief and applied to the fluted wall of the lowest bronze basin. Correct orientation of the signs was necessary to provide a functional as well as an ornamental theme, and considerable research was required to determine the exact astronomical relation of the signs to their final placement on the fountain. Finally, working on the basic fact that on March 21st the sun arrives at the first point of Aries the Ram, it was established that by placing the sign of Capricorn directly South, on the axis of the driveway of the National Gallery of Art, the sign of Aries in its proper sequence around the fountain would then be touched by the sun's rays on the vernal equinox (March 21) and would face the rising sun directly from then until April 20.

The fountain was constructed by John McShain of Philadelphia, and required twelve months to build. One unexpected deterrent was encountered in the foundations. For, while excavating on the Pennsylvania Avenue side, the engineers discovered an abandoned and unidentified tunnel, measuring approximately 7' in width and 8' in height. This remnant of the city's past had to be backfilled with concrete in order to achieve a proper bearing for the fountain. But perhaps the greatest difficulty encountered during the period of construction was the necessity

of achieving a perfect level, not only in the foundations, but also in the top rim of each basin, so that an even flow of water over the edges would be insured. Any variation of level around the basin would have destroyed the effect desired. This even level has been further insured through a pile system by which the fountain is bearing on two concentric rings of 30-ton concrete piles driven from 30' to 40' into the ground.

Within the inner ring of pile foundations is located the apparatus room housing the two centrifugal pumps necessary to service the fountain. Pump #1 serves to drive the central jet of water out of its 2½" supply pipe to the 15' to 18' height specified by the designers. Pump #2 fills the lower two bronze basins and by recirculation maintains the water level. The structural engineers concerned with the foundations were Tuck & Eipel, of New York City, and the firm of Edward E. Ashley Associates, also of New York, were the mechanical engineers for the project.

Many months of experimentation were carried out at the plant of the Worthington Pump & Machinery Corporation, where intensive tests on scale and full size models of various portions of the fountain determined the exact quantity of water necessary to achieve the desired effect of an unbroken sheet of water over the basin lip. The first step in the necessary experimentation was carried out on the original plaster model, from which the bronze bowls were later cast. The plaster was given a waterproof coating and a tank was built behind a section of the model to determine the actual curvature and overhang of the lip.

While designing the fountain, Eggers & Higgins were convinced that a jet of water such as that furnished by the main supply pipe would take on an "umbrella" effect when it reached its peak and splash haphazardly over the fountain. To drive this jet straight up so that the desired "plume" effect was achieved, twelve secondary high speed nozzles were placed around the main nozzle to support the jet of water. The same water is constantly recirculated by the two centrifugal pumps, which are exactly coordinated to maintain the amount of water in the basin at an unchanging level at all times; the only actual losses of water are small ones occuring through evaporation and other natural causes. The fountain uses approximately 150,000 gallons of water when functioning properly.

The fountain's three bronze basins were first modeled in clay by the sculptor and then cast in plaster. The final casting, in bronze, was done by the General Bronze Corporation and is in a statuary finish. The uppermost basin measures 4'6" in diameter, while the second basin has an increased diameter of 15'. The main and largest bronze basin has a diameter of 38' and is the largest fountain basin ever cast in bronze. It was cast in four parts, then welded and burnished to give a continuous surface. The bronze baffle which insures a smooth flow of water over the lip of this basin is placed about 7' from its rim.

The lowest basin of the fountain is formed of concrete supporting a molded granite curb and pebbled with quartz stones to reflect light through the water and give color and sparkle.

This lowest basin is essentially a pool, with its water level one foot above the level of the paving. The granite used throughout is Pink Swenson, with an 8-cut finish.

Surrounding the fountain is a seven-foot wide granite walkway a few steps above sidewalk level. On the curve of the extended radius of the fountain is an unpolished granite seat, 25' long and 4' high. Incised in the center of the back of the seat, are the words:

1855 ANDREW W. MELLON 1937
FINANCIER INDUSTRIALIST STATESMAN
SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY 1921 - 1932
AMBASSADOR TO GREAT BRITAIN 1932 - 1933
FOUNDER OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART - 1937
THIS FOUNTAIN IS A TRIBUTE FROM HIS FRIENDS

The planting is dominated by four large elm trees which form a terminus for the stately double row of elms on both sides of Constitution Avenue. Extensive ground cover, of myrtle, yew and other plants, is designed to make the site attractive even in months when it is not feasible to operate the fountain itself. Landscape architects were Clarke and Rapuano of New York City.

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COPY

(PUBLIC LAW 194--80th Congress)

(Chapter 257--1st Session)

(H. J. Res. 170)

JOINT RESOLUTION

Authorizing the erection in the District of Columbia of a memorial to Andrew W. Mellon.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized and directed to grant authority to the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Committee to erect a memorial fountain on public grounds in the vicinity of the intersection of Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues, in the District of Columbia, such grounds being now owned by the United States; Provided, That the design and location of the memorial shall be approved by the National Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and the United States shall be put to no expense in or by the erection of this memorial: Provided further, That unless funds, which in the estimation of the Secretary of the Interior are sufficient to insure the completion of the memorial, are certified available, and the erection of this memorial begun within five years from and after the date of passage of this joint resolution, the authorization hereby granted is revoked.

Approved July 16, 1947.